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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 10/28/09

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(1) Futenma Air Station relocation issue further meandering off track with the defense minister hinting at readiness to approve present plan, the foreign minister proposing integration of Futenma functions into Kadena Air Base, and the prime minister intending to take time to reach a decision

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
October 28, 2009

With the U.S. President's arrival in Japan on Nov. 12 just ahead, the Hatoyama administration is increasingly wavering over security policy. Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada referred to a plan to integrate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan City, Okinawa Prefecture, into Kadena Air Base in Kadena Town, Okinawa Prefecture. In the meantime, Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa said that implementing the present relocation plan will not break an election pledge. Prime Minister Hatoyama repeatedly said that he wanted to take time (to reach a decision). The U.S.'s hard-line stance has thus highlighted differences in the sense of crisis felt by cabinet ministers and the absence of anyone to coordinate their views.

"I have been calling for moving the Futenma functions out of the prefecture or the nation," said the prime minister. "I understand how the defense minister feels. However, I don't necessarily agree with him." Thus the prime minister brushed aside the defense minister's statement on the Futenma base issue.

The present plan agreed to by Japan and the U.S. is to relocate Futenma facilities to near the coast of Camp Schwab in Nago City. The defense minister takes the position that this plan is not in breach of the DPJ's election pledge, because the Japan-U.S. agreement also mentions the relocation of part of Futenma functions outside the prefecture, including the transfer of 8,000 Marines to Guam and the relocation of the carrier-based aircraft unit to Iwakuni Air Station.

However, the DPJ's manifesto for the August Lower House election,

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which it won by a landslide, mentions that the party will deal with U.S. military bases with the possibility of taking a second look at them. Given the fact that the prime minister himself said during the election campaign, "at the least relocation outside the prefecture," the defense minister's statement clearly contradicts the manifesto. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano was frantic about hushing up the statement, noting, "That is not the government's view."

The government has decided to terminate the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean in January next year, when the operation is set to end. The defense minister revealed his stance of looking into refueling vessels of countries that are taking part in anti-piracy operations off Somalia. The prime minister denied such an option straight off, saying, "I do not have such an idea in my mind." Even a number of ruling party members criticized the defense minister's statement with Social Democratic Party (SDP) Secretary General Yasumasa Shigeno saying, "Why is he so eager to do a favor for the United States?"

The foreign minister and the defense minister were about to come to a decision on the transfer of the Futenma functions within the prefecture. However, the defense minister reportedly did not communicate to the foreign minister his decision to make such a statement. The defense minister told the press corps, "Logically speaking, such an option is a little bit difficult." When the foreign minister proposed a plan to integrate Futenma Air Station into Kadena Air Base, the defense minister rebutted him, saying, "That will not sit well with the government's stance."

The Hatoyama administration is caught on the horns of dilemma between consideration to the U.S., which is applying pressure on Japan over the Futenma relocation issue, and upholding the manifest. Statements made by various cabinet ministers indicate differences in their feelings of distance with the U.S. There is also an aspect that the prime minister and the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) have a weak sense of the crisis facing the present state of Japan-U.S. relations, compared with the foreign ministry and the defense ministry, which are engaged in tough diplomatic negotiations.

At a press conference on the 27th Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano warned, "Statements made by various cabinet ministers are reportedly causing concern in the U.S. If that is the case, I would like them to refrain from making such statements."

(2) Futenma relocation issue: Careless statements by ministers, strong pressure from U.S. undermining Japan-U.S. alliance

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
October 28, 2009

Discord in the Hatoyama government over the issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture is becoming increasingly serious. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and the cabinet ministers do not seem to be fully aware of the weight of their statements. They are sticking to the Democratic Party of Japan's campaign pledge for the latest House of Representatives election to review the existing Futenma-relocation plan, but they are also being "pressed by the U.S.," as described by a source connected to Japan-U.S. relations, to quickly implement the plan to relocate the Futenma facility to the coastal area of U.S. Camp Schwab. Under such circumstances, Japan-U.S. relations are becoming

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more strained.

"Although cabinet ministers can be easily replaced, it is impossible to replace the prime minister. You can leave (the Futenma issue) in our hands." Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada has been making this remark whenever he meets Hatoyama. Okada has said, "Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa and I will take full responsibility," apparently bearing in mind Hatoyama's inconsistent remarks made in the past over the deadline for reaching a conclusion on the Futenma issue. On Oct. 20, Okada, Kitazawa and Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano exchanged views on the issue.

However, remarks by Okada and Kitazawa in press conferences yesterday exposed that there is a wide gap between their views. Kitazawa indicated that he would approve the existing plan, bearing in mind U.S. President Barack Obama's planned visit to Japan in November, but Okada expressed his eagerness to push ahead with a plan to integrate the functions of Futenma with Kadena Air Base.

Some persons connected with the Defense Ministry take this view: "The defense minister's remarks might have come out in response to advice from an aide to the prime minister." The aide reportedly told Kitazawa that the plans to transfer U.S. Marines to Guam and refueling aircraft to the Iwakuni Marine Air Station - in the Japan-U.S. agreement on the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan - are in accordance with the party's campaign pledge to move personnel or facilities outside the nation or the prefecture. When U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Japan recently, he strongly urged Kitazawa to implement the existing plan. Given this, it is said that Kitazawa is now eager to bring about a solution to the Futenma issue at an early date.

Okada was at a loss for words yesterday when he heard Kitazawa's remarks. Meanwhile, aides to the defense minister have expressed displeasure at Okada's reference to the Kadena-Futenma integration plan, with one official remarking: "I wonder why (Mr. Okada) has proposed the plan at his own discretion."

When the DPJ was an opposition party, the party strongly criticized inconsistent remarks made by cabinet ministers, pointing out a lack of unity in the government led by the Liberal Democratic Party. In the upcoming extraordinary Diet session, the DPJ will be inevitably grilled over the lack of unity in the party.

LDP Secretary General Oshima told reporters at party headquarters yesterday: "Under the pretext of politician-led politics, senior government members have asserted themselves. This situation reflects that the prime minister has not exerted leadership."

The government's miscalculation of U.S. moves appears to have caused the ongoing turmoil. Many government officials had anticipated that the U.S. government would show understanding for the new Japanese government's policy switch, as shown by Hatoyama's remark to reporters at the Prime Minister's Official Residence on Oct. 23: "The U.S. has made a major policy change toward Iraq since the new government was launched."

The U.S. newspaper Wall Street Journal (online), however, carried an article on Oct. 26 noting: "The crack in the Japan-U.S. security alliance is widening." Even media outlets have begun to take a tough stance (toward Japan). A senior Foreign Ministry official expressed concern: "The current Japan-U.S. relationship is in the worst shape

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it has been in for the past several dozen years."

Speaking before reporters yesterday, Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima denounced the Hatoyama administration's wavering responses, saying: "The government is trying to resolve the base issue with rhetoric, but such an approach is careless."

(3) Letter to the editor: Listen to Okinawa's voice on Futenma relocation

ASAHI (Page 18) (Full)  
October 28, 2009

Yasuo Fujikawa, 52, national government employee from Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture

At his meeting with Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa on Oct. 21, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that any plan other than relocation to Henoko is unacceptable for Futenma relocation and that the plan to relocate Marines to Guam will be scrapped, pressing for the implementation of the Japan-U.S. agreement. It is not surprising that the U.S. made such a statement.

However, all the Liberal Democratic Party candidates in favor of Henoko relocation lost in all four districts of Okinawa in the recent House of Representatives election, and candidates opposed to Henoko relocation won. The election outcome shows that a majority of the people of Okinawa, where 75 percent of U.S. military facilities in Japan are concentrated, desire the relocation of the Futenma base out of the prefecture. It is very understandable for the Okinawan people, who have had to endure U.S. aircraft accidents and incidents of assaults by U.S. soldiers for a long time, to demand the relocation of this military base with an airfield that is said to be the most dangerous in the world.

While it is important to maintain good relations with Japan's ally, the United States, is it not more important for Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama to listen to Okinawa's voice as the leader of a sovereign country? The Obama administration in the United States has reversed many of the policies of the previous administration. Prime Minister Hatoyama should take seriously the people's voice as expressed through the election results and negotiate with the U.S.

(4) Op-ed column: Concerns about the negative synergism of mutual "passing" in Japan and the U.S.

SANKEI (Page 7) (Full)  
October 24, 2009

Akio Takahata, deputy chief commentary writer

I recently heard the expression "Washington passing" at a meeting of U.S. scholars of Japan. This was a meeting to discuss the new Hatoyama administration's policy toward the United States.

A controversy over "Japan passing" occurred between Japan and the U.S. in 1998, or 11 years ago. At that time, U.S. President Bill Clinton made a nine-day visit to China to showcase close cooperation with Chinese leaders but did not stop in Japan. The Japanese side reacted with anger and resentment for his "passing" by Japan, a U.S. ally.

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Similar to gardening

Perhaps this time the U.S. side is wondering if the Hatoyama administration is going to bypass Washington. Former Ambassador to the U.S. Ryozo Kato once compared the alliance to a garden in need of daily care. If there are widespread concerns in America about Japan breaking away from the U.S., the alliance relationship indeed needs daily tending.

Mr. Kato pointed out in January 2008 that "compared with other gardens, beautiful flowers bloom and the grass is green in the garden of the Japan-U.S. relationship. But the garden needs to be tended to. We should handle specific issues with great care while keeping our focus on the overall picture." Since then a change of administration has taken place both in the U.S. and Japan, and the environment surrounding the garden has changed drastically.

While Prime Minister Hatoyama and Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada have paid lip service to "developing the Japan-U.S. relationship further to mark the 50th anniversary of the revision of the Japan-U.S. security treaty next year," Secretary of Defense Robert Gates bluntly stated that "rather than celebrating what the two countries have achieved in the past, the more important thing is what we will achieve in the future."

It is obvious that what the Secretary meant by "future" is the question of the relocation of the U.S. forces' Futenma Air Station (in Ginowan City, Okinawa) in particular. The Futenma issue dates back many years, to 1996. In the aftermath of the gang rape of a schoolgirl by U.S. soldiers in 1995, a solution to the over-concentration (75 percent) of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ) bases in Okinawa became a political issue. Subsequently, the report of the bilateral Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) called for the complete return of the Futenma base.

But 13 years after the decision the base has yet to be returned. During this time the sentiments of the local leaders and the Okinawan people fluctuated in complicated ways. The Hatoyama administration is deferring a decision for domestic political reasons, but the U.S. side, which has experienced a similar change of administration, thinks if America has made a decision, why can't Japan?

Delicate dominoes

If the Japanese side is thinking of relocating the Marines to Guam and moving Futenma out of Okinawa, it is seriously mistaken. Guam relocation and Futenma relocation are dominoes in a delicate relationship. They are elements of a closely-linked package agreement. If the parts are tampered with willfully, the whole package will come under stress and prove undoable.

Secretary Gates's statement that "there can be no relocation of the Marines to Guam without Futenma relocation, and there will also be no returning other bases and facilities" was probably based on his knowledge of the extreme complexity of the negotiation process for USFJ realignment. If Japanese policy regarding this issue continues to drift, Okinawans' long-cherished dream for the return of the Futenma base will be delayed and the burden bases impose on local communities will not be lightened.

More importantly, USFJ realignment is an indispensable component of

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the ongoing global military realignment by the U.S. to adapt to the military and security needs and changes in the 21st Century.

While this is not written into the Japan-U.S. agreement out of diplomatic considerations, realignment is also a precaution against China's military expansion and the threat of North Korea's nuclear arms and missiles. If realignment is delayed, this will not only seriously undermine Japan's defense, but also U.S. force deployment in Asia and the Pacific, as well as global U.S. strategy. It will also seriously undermine the deterrence of the alliance.

Need for good gardeners

Hatoyama's risky diplomacy is not only evident in the Futenma issue.

There are also numerous contradictions and questionable points in his remark that Japan "has been over dependent on the U.S." and in the thinking of those regarded as advisers to the administration.

While the administration claims to value the bilateral military alliance, the call for a "security treaty without stationing troops," first made over 10 years ago, has re-emerged. Although the administration says it will not ostracize the U.S., there are lingering concerns about the exclusion of the U.S. from the East Asian Community. The notions of an "equilateral triangular Japan-U.S.-China relationship" or Japan serving as a "bridge for the world" are similar to the concept of a "balancer in East Asia" advocated by the previous Roh Moo-hyun administration of South Korea -- a concept that was somehow unrealistic.

President Barack Obama has decided to shorten his visit to Japan to two days and to visit China for four days. This was probably based on the judgment that the Japan visit will bear no fruit.

There was a time in the 1990s when Japan and the U.S. failed to give the garden adequate attention, resulting in the drifting of the alliance. If once again there is the negative synergism of the two countries on opposite sides of the Pacific passing each other there is no guarantee the alliance will not be set adrift a second time. The present Hatoyama diplomacy requires not lip service to the proposition that the alliance is the linchpin of foreign policy, but rather good gardeners capable of making it flourish.

(5) MSDF destroyer, South Korean container ship collide; Hatoyama administration's crisis management capability tested for first time

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
October 28, 2009

A collision between the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyer Kurama and a civilian container ship was the first incident in which the Hatoyama administration was tested its crisis management capability.

On the night of Oct. 27, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama ordered Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Crisis Management Tetsuro Ito to quickly gather information and learn what really happened in the collision. Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa said, "I hope that optimum precautions are taken to prevent the spread of fire on the ship."

At 8:11 p.m., 15 minutes after the collision, the Cabinet Information Aggregation Center at the Prime Minister's Official

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Residence (Kantei) received the first report of the incident. On receiving the report, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano immediately reported the incident to the Prime Minister. Hatoyama was in his office on the fifth floor at the Kantei when the collision occurred, but he left at 8:37 p.m. for his private residence in Denenchofu, Tokyo. He ordered Ito to thoroughly gather information before leaving the Kantei.

According to the Defense Ministry, Kitazawa received the report at 08:10 p.m. and arrived at the ministry at 08:50 p.m. He sent Senior Vice Defense Minister Kazuya Shinba to the site. At the same time, he held a press conference at the ministry and apologized, saying, "It is extremely regrettable that the incident has caused concern and trouble for the public." He also said, "I apologize to the public for shutting down the Kanmon Strait."

When the MSDF Aegis ship Atago collided with a fishing boat in February 2008 when Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda was in office, it took 90 minutes before Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba received the first report, exposing an inadequate communication network for emergencies. In 2001 Ehime Prefecture's long-line tuna fishing training ship Ehime Maru sunk after being struck by a U.S. Navy nuclear submarine off Hawaii. Then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori came under severe criticism for continuing to play golf even after he had received a report on the collision.

Kitazawa received the report 14 minutes after the collision. This means that the Hatoyama administration applied the lessons learned in the Atago incident. The information transmission system has been improved.

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